

A
S E R M O N
P R E A C H E D

Before the
Q U E E N,

A T
W H I T E - H A L L,

On *Sunday, Octob. 2.* 1692.

By *CHARLES HICKMAN, D.D.*
Chaplain in Ordinary to Their Majesties.

Published by Her Majesty's Special Command.

L O N D O N,

Printed for *Walter Kettilby*, at the *Bishop's Head* in
St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1692.

15th

Dr. *HICKMAN's*
SERMON
Before the
QUEEN,
October 2. 1692.

DE WILKINSON
SERMON

CHURCH
OF THE

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THE
SCHOOL
OF
THE
FUTURE

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A
SERMON
PREACHED
Before the
QUEEN.

DEUT. XXX. 15.

*See I have set before thee this day, life
and good, and death and evil.*

THere is no man alive but will easily confess,
That Life is good, and Death is evil; and
so far we are all ready to join issue with my
Text. Nay, there are few men either so
negligent or perverse, but that they are solicitous
to avoid the evil, and to chuse the good; and
thus far also there are fair hopes of an Accommo-
dation.

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But

But then here lies the difference. Though we are all agreed in the main point, yet we are apt to vary in our Notions of the subordinate kinds of Good and Evil, according to the variety of our Tempers and Inclinations. Some men judge of these things by their Reason, examine how agreeable they are to our uncorrupted Nature, and what consequences they are likely to produce; a safe, but withal, a tedious way. And therefore others, for more dispatch, make a judgment of them only by their sense, and will allow nothing to be good, but what gives them present Entertainment, nothing Evil but what brings them into present Pain.

And hence it is, That they so studiously devote themselves to the Profits and Pleasures of the World, which afford them some sensible Satisfaction, some immediate Relief; But as for Virtue, all the good of it they think depends upon such remote Consequences, such uncertain Fruits, that they utterly neglect it, as a Plant of too doubtful a Product, or at best of too slow a Growth.

Some think it is not in their power to be good; and others think it not worth their while: and though they are much concern'd for the evil which they suffer, yet they have no regard to the evil.

evil which they do. Either they look upon moral Actions as things indifferent, that have no real intrinsic value, no natural Obligation of themselves, or at most they do not think them of such Moment and Importance, as to determine us absolutely either to Life or Death.

Against all which mistakes I must beg leave to speak briefly and plainly and practically from the Authority of my Text, *See I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil*; In which words *Moses* gives us to understand, that the Law of God *sets before us Good and Evil*, in a twofold respect.

I. As a Matter of Information, to shew us the real difference that is between them, and the different Consequences which they produce.

II. As a Matter of Choice, that when we know the difference, we may be perswaded to refuse the *Evil*, and chuse the *Good*.

I. And, *First*, by way of Information. *See, I have set before thee life and good, and death and evil*, says God; and yet there are men who live as if there was no difference between Good and Evil; as if Sin were nothing but a groundless name, and they resolv'd to follow the bent of their own Inclinations, let the Law say what it pleases,
or

or the Consequence be what it will. They think the only Happiness of Man is to live without restraint, to give a loose to his Lusts and Passions, and in all points to follow the Extravagancies of his Nature. That 'tis below a Man of Spirit to be ty'd up to servile Rules, and subject to the Reason of other Men, *We are they that ought to speak, and who is Lord over us?*

This is indeed the Language of many in our times. But if they would let any body speak beside themselves, they might easily learn, That there are Two things which have an undoubted Right to be Lords over them, and ought, in Reason, to be heard:

1. The Word of God, and
2. The Voice of their own Conscience: either of which is able to convince them of their Errour, and to shew them a wide difference between Good and Evil.

For, *First*, The Word of God *sets before us* this difference, in so plain convincing Terms, that though we may be perverted by Evil, yet 'tis hard for us to be mistaken. Though God has sent us into this Wilderness of a World, where there are many intricate Passages to perplex us, and much Variety of Objects to distract our Thoughts, yet *he has not left us without*

without a Guide, nor *himself without a witness*. He has given us his word, as a perfect Rule, by which we shall certainly be try'd at last: and therefore by this Rule we ought to try our own Actions now.

Here all the Doubts of our Judgment are expounded, all the Scruples of our Conscience are resolv'd: *He hath shew'd thee, O man, what is good*, and whatsoever evil we are addicted to, in his Law we find the Folly of it plainly exposed, and all its Dangers laid open to us. It gives us many glorious Instances of Vertue to invite us, and many dreadful Judgments upon Vice, to fright us into Religion; and whatsoever difficult Circumstances the natural Man may labour under, yet here *the man of God* is perfectly forewarn'd against every Evil, and *thoroughly furnished for every Good work*.

And therefore it was a very just and proper Commendation, which *Philo* the Jew gives us of *Moses* his Design, That he has introduced his Law with the History of the Creation, on purpose to shew us how exactly the Commandments of God are accommodated to the Nature of us Men. So very exactly, that if we will but consult this Oracle with honest, humble Minds, we can no longer be at a loss to find out the just measures of Truth, as far as we are concern'd to

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know;

know; and the true bounds of Goodness, as far as we are oblig'd to practise; and any farther, any nicer search, has more of Curiosity in it than Religion.

And now how great a Happiness is it, That we enjoy the benefit of this Holy Word, and are infallibly conducted by a Light from Heaven, through all the Uncertainties and Dangers that beset us upon Earth!

With what infinite Pleasure should we apply ourselves to the study of this Law, which, like the Pillar of Fire that led the *Israelites* out of *Egypt*, is not only our Guide, but our Encouragement in travail, and supports our Spirits at the same time when it directs our Feet.

Indeed, the Light of God's Word is so convincing; so plainly does it set before us the difference between Good and Evil, that for this very reason evil Men find it offensive to them, and therefore they lay it by. It shines so full upon their Face, that they cannot enjoy their sins in quiet for it; and 'tis this that makes them cry out against *Moses*, as *Dathan* and *Abiram* did, *Wilt thou put out the eyes of this people?*

But, *Secondly*, though they should lay aside the Law, and refuse to give audience to the

the Word of God; though *Moses* and the Prophets should be silent, yet Conscience, when it comes to speak for it self, as it will sometimes do, is as convincing as any Revelation, and as obliging as any Law; 'tis a Witness that will not be silenc'd, and a Judge that cannot be suborn'd.

'Tis this that makes us look upon some Actions with Abhorrence, and upon others with Delight; and according to the Result of our Love or Hatred, according to this inward Relish or Disgust, so we learn to discover the difference between Good and Evil, and find that every Action of Man has an indelible Character stamp'd upon it, by which its value is easie to be known.

'Tis true, that this Evidence also may be stifled for a time; and there are those who, with much ado, wear out these Characters of Good and Evil, which Nature has imprinted in their Souls, That when they have conquer'd their Conscience, and kept it under, they may for a while enjoy their sins in peace, and live as if there was no God in the World.

But how noble a Conquest this is, and how long the peace is like to last, we shall consider under the following Head: in the mean time I

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shall

shall only say, That they who despise the Majesty of God, can have no regard to the Rights of Men, but as often as a fair occasion offers, they will be for levelling all above them, and trampling upon all below them, and therefore are so far from deserving favour, that they are not fit for humane Conversation: for when once they have thrown off all concern for Vertue, how easily do they break down all bounds of Law, and allow themselves in such Extravagancies, as are a contradiction to the reason of all Mankind: there is nothing so prophane which they will not practise; nothing so sacred which they will not prophane: and think it a peculiar Honour of their own, to be above the common Ordinances of the World, and to despise a tame, governable Creature. With them 'tis accounted no Vertue to forgive an Enemy, no Vice to betray a Friend; Nay, Vertue it self shall be called a Weakness, and their Vices honoured with the name of Wit: as if they had not only a peculiar Law, but a peculiar Language also of their own.

And yet, for all the pretended Wit and Honour of this Race of Men, there is not so vile, so foolish a Creature in the World as they. Nay, 'tis only the vileness of their practice that is their Protection; for should other Men but follow their Example, and assume the same Liberties which they allow

low themselves, should other Men but let their Lusts and Passions loose like them, they would soon grow weary of this Heathenish State, and fly for Sanctuary to Religion.

For after all the Attempts that Vice can make upon it, yet Vertue is establish'd upon such a Foundation, as never can be remov'd. It has stood its ground through all the Ages and Revolutions of the World, and there never yet was a time when true Goodness was not held in Honour, and Wickedness look'd upon with Reproach. The Heathens themselves, though they often changed their Gods, yet they never changed their Vertue; but in their several Writings have left us their Notions of Good and Evil, so fairly represented, and so faithfully described, as may serve for the Reproach of many Christians, and the Instruction of All.

Nay, those Heathenish Nations, who have yet no Knowledge of the Law, are, nevertheless, a Law unto themselves, and keep so strict to the Rules of Justice, as shews, That Vertue is a thing of Universal Obligation, of Eternal Truth, and whosoever refuses to be govern'd by it, is worse than an Infidel, a Rebel to Nature, and an Outlaw both to God and Man. He breaks off all Commerce and Communication with Mankind; will not be join'd in any League, Friendship,

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or Society with his Fellow-Creatures, nor submit to any of those common terms, whereby we hold a Conversation with one another.

In a word; Without Vertue there is no Peace, without Goodness there is no living in the World. And this Argument alone is demonstration enough, That there is a real difference between Good and Evil; which difference though many of us neglect it in our Practice, yet in speculation, there are a few, and but a few of us, that have the confidence to deny it. But then,

II. There is another, and a more numerous sort of Men, who though they do allow the difference, yet do not think the difference is so great, as that Life or Death should be the necessary consequence of Good or Evil: Like ignorant Men, who think there is no need of forfeiting their Bond, though they do not perform the Obligation.

In the day that thou eatest thou shalt surely die, says God; a very plain, and very pressing Text, and yet if the Devil may be allowed to make the Comment, he will give us a very different account, so far from dying, That *in the day thou eatest thou shalt be like God himself*, and in a way to live for evermore. Thus poor cheated Man loses one Paradise for the false expectation

tion of another, and forfeits all his Happiness, by taking the Devil's word for his Security. Thus we also, to humour our Lusts, and indulge our Passions, still catch at the forbidden Fruit, and in the fond Pursuit of some childish Hopes, we lay aside all our reasonable Fears.

Though we know that Good and evil have their distinct Regions; their proper Roads, and are parted but by a single Line; yet we love to allow our selves a little latitude, and think we may do it without losing of our way. Though we see the Bounds of Vertue set out before us, and hear God himself saying to us, *Thus far shalt thou go and no farther*; yet we take a Pleasure in making our excursions, and hope that a little trespass will break no measures, and so, by degrees, we are drawn on to trespass more and more, till we utterly lose our selves, and both God's measures and our own are broken.

So dangerous a thing is it to border upon Vice, and play upon the Confines of Destruction; for when our Foot is once taken in the snare, 'tis no hard matter for the Devil to draw in our whole Body after; and all this comes by presuming too far upon God's Goodness, and when he bids us obey his Commands and live, we hope to live nevertheless, though we let his Commands alone.

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He sets before us death and evil as things inseparably join'd together, but we presumptuously embrace the evil, and yet think to escape the death.

And yet do we not know the necessary connexion that there is between the Punishment and the Offence? Does not our own Reason, as well as the Word of God, assure us, That Death is the natural Consequence of Sin? Is not our own experience a demonstration, how miserably Vice corrupts our Nature, and how certainly it brings us to an untimely end? And without the Spirit of Prophecy, any one might easily foretell, *That a wicked man shall not live out half his days.*

If the just revenge, of both God and men, should spare him, yet how effectually does the Sinner destroy himself? by Covetousness we starve, and by Luxury we over-charge our Nature; Anger inflames our Blood, and Envy consumes our Flesh, and every inordinate Desire is a secret exhausting of our Strength. No Lust but feeds upon our Vitals, no Passion but preys upon our Spirits; and Sin no sooner enters into our Heart, but it opens the door for Death. Then the Worm insensibly grows upon us, the Grave gets us under its dominion, and from the very day that Vice took possession of our Soul, we must date the dissolution of our Body.

Nay,

Nay, this is not the worst of our condition neither; for Sin corrupts the Soul of Man also, and depraves all our brighter Faculties; it debauches our Will, and darkens our Understanding, and extinguishes that Reason which is our great Property and Prerogative. God breathed into our nostrils the breath of Life, a beam of Divine Light, a spark of Heavenly Fire, to ennoble our Nature, and make us a living Soul; the Image of God, and Heirs of his Eternity. But Lust puts out all this light within us; enslaves our Mind, and makes us degenerate into meer earth again; it weighs down our Nature, checks all our aspiring Thoughts, and allows us to think of nothing but our Flesh.

Where Vice prevails, and takes possession of our Senses, it shuts up all the avenues of our Soul, and lets nothing that is generous or commendable enter in. The Beauty of Holiness cannot be seen; the Charms of Wisdom cannot be heard: nothing can be admitted but what will sooth our Lusts, and flatter us in our iniquity.

And then 'tis no wonder if we grow profligate in Vice, and abandon'd to all manner of Uncleaness: and can we suppose, that such a Soul as this is fit to appear before the presence of its Maker? Is there any place in Hea-

ven for such impure Thoughts as these? Unless we come there with a better mind, and in a cleaner dress, *Go, ye cursed*, will certainly be our doom; Go to the torments which you have prepared for your selves; let your Envy gnaw you still like a worm that never dies, and your Anger still burn within you, like the fire that never goes out, and let your greedy desires be always craving, but never satisfied, like the bottomless pit, that is ever filling, but never full.

. Oh the bitterness and anguish of this second Death! When the Soul of Man must be always dying but never dead, when eternal Torments will brood afresh upon his Nature, and insufferable pains will propagate themselves within him: when his own guilty Conscience shall always keep him waking, his own desperate Resolutions shall strike him like spears and arrows to the heart, and the remembrance of all his multitude of Sins shall stare him like so many ghastly Apparitions in the face.

These are the necessary consequences of an ungodly, unrepented Life; these are the genuine fruits of Sin, which naturally grow upon a vitiated Soul; so very naturally, that our own Reason tells us it must be so, that the Soul which is corrupted, even that shall die, and our vile Imaginations shall haunt us to the other World, where
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all our immoderate delights shall be sower'd into
so many intolerable torments.

Something like this every wicked man finds
within himself, even before his death; as often as
he allows himself to think, so often his own Con-
science acts the part of Hell, and in the dismal
remorses of his Soul, he sees a resemblance of his
future Judgment.

And now having *set before you life and good, and
death and evil*, as a matter of information, I come,
in the

Second place, to set them before you as an ob-
ject of your choice. 'Tis *Moses* his own Use and
Application of my Text, in the following verses,
*I call heaven and earth to record this day against
you, that I have set before you life and death, there-
fore chuse life, that both thou and thy seed may
live.*

I shall not here dispute with *Moses*, whether
it be in our power to chuse or not; but, taking
for granted that it is, I shall only infer, That
when things of so very different natures are set
before us, one would think it an easie matter to
be determin'd. If our notions of Good and Evil
are too weak to work upon us, and hold our
minds for some time in suspence; yet surely Life
and Death admit of no dispute. One is the sole

delight, and the other the utter abhorrence of our Nature, and a powerful instinct within us always inclines us to the better part.

And yet so absurd are we in our Practice, as to follow those courses, which in our judgment we condemn, and our lives are the very contradiction of our desires. We engage our selves in desperate ways before we consider where they are like to end, and every appearance of pleasure drags us further on; and when we do see at length what our end is like to prove, we find it too tedious, and perhaps too late to return.

Could we plead ignorance in our excuse, we might have some hopes of mercy. But when all these things are plainly *set before us*, when we see the penalty, and notwithstanding this, will venture upon the offence, *what remains then but a fearful looking for of judgment?*

Could we pretend impotence or incapacity in the case, it might be a proper and allowable Plea, but when these things are not only plainly represented to our judgment, but are fairly offer'd to our choice, and yet we will chuse amiss, What can we say to stop the hand of Justice? or when Justice lays hold upon us, what can we say to excuse our folly? Why did we run so blindly on, and never look before us? Why,
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we suppos'd perhaps that some lucky mischance might stop us in our full career, and the breaking of a Leg might save our Neck. A wild course, and as extravagant a supposition.

We hop'd the time would come when we should be disabled from following our Vices any longer, and then we should have leisure to stand still, and repent, and be very vertuous again. A strange kind of hope, that can never take place till we come to the very season of despair.

We expect perhaps, that some violent motion of the Spirit should carry us up to Heaven like St. Paul, and if we are but passive in the case, if we are *not disobedient to the heavenly motion*, we presume there is nothing more for us to do. And it is a presumption indeed, too groundless to be believ'd, and too senseless to be answer'd.

We may flatter our selves, if we please, with such airy hopes, and depend upon a Salvation of our own contriving; but if we would go upon certain grounds, 'tis sufficient for us, That God himself, whose gift it is, has told us upon what terms we must live and prosper, *See, I have set before you life and good*; and if after this we will venture upon *Evil*, we our selves are answerable for the Event, and 'tis but just that God should take the forfeiture. *Death and Evil*, we know, must

must go together, unless we can separate them by our Repentance, which it self is a *death unto sin*, and a greater evil than we know how to bear.

'Tis sufficient that we see our way before us, that we ly no longer under any dark uncertainties, any dismal suspense, but our work is laid open to our hands, and our reward is ready for us. Our work itself is very good, and our reward is exceeding glorious; but if we resist these gracious offers, and still persist in a senseless provoking course of Life, we deserve the severest punishment, not only for our sin, but for our obstinate folly too.

These are the things which the Law of God daily sets before us, and if the charms of goodness cannot draw us, yet one would think the terrours of Evil should drive us into Vertue. What would we not do to purchase Eternal Life? What would we not suffer to escape Eternal Death? What should we do but renounce our Sins, what should we suffer but this reasonable Divorce, and then the thing is done? and what does God require of us, but those very things which our own reason requires of us too; things that are most suitable to our nature, and most likely to promote our happiness in this World, though we had no expectation of a World to come? when it is so
easy

easy a thing to prosper, who would take such pains to be undone? when it is in our own choice to live, *Why will ye dy, O house of Israel?*

The reason is plain, we are deeply engaged, Body and Soul, in another interest; our Lusts, by a long familiarity have so endeared themselves unto us, that we know not how to part. We are so ty'd and bound with the Chain of our Sins, that when God calls us to Repentance, we are not able to move a step. Not able? That is indeed we are not willing to advance, we have such a load of iniquity upon us; that we think it more easy to ly down and dy, than to shake off our deadly weight, and live.

But if we seriously consider'd what it was to dy, we should quickly be of another mind. When Death with his cold frozen hands lays hold upon us, and is dragging us out of a soft sinful Bed, into an uncomfortable Dungeon, a noisome Grave, then all our heats will be abated, and we shall repent indeed, and wish that we had repented sooner, before 'twas too late to be reform'd.

Let us consider this in time; now, that it is fairly *set before us*, and 'tis in our power to make our choice. And if we see that wicked men find it so difficult to dis-engage themselves, that the prospect of Death it self, with all its terrours, cannot affright

affright them from their Sins , let us beware of the dreadful Example , let us beware how we admit a Guest into our Bosom , who is like to stick so fast upon us , and brings after him such a deadly train. Let us keep him at a religious distance , and superstitiously avoid his sight. Let us enter into no Parly or Combination with him , but maintain the integrity of our Soul , as we would do our Soul it self , and stand in aw of Sin , as much as Death.

If we have unfortunately let him in , and the Enemy has already got some advantage of us , let us redeem our selves in time , and use all diligence to dispossess him ; though he has ty'd and bound us never so fast , yet one vigorous resolution may break the Chain ; it is but resolving to be free , and then , by the help of our Redeemer , we shall be so.

And have we no sense of Life , and Liberty , and Happiness ? shall one vain foolish Lust weigh down all the considerations of Eternity ? surely there is some Witchcraft in this Sin , and we are not so much perswaded by it as possess'd : but in the name of God we will cast it out. We will set before us *Death and Evil* , as God himself has set them both together , and then there is no danger that we should be impos'd upon : for Sin cannot possibly be so much our delight , but Death is much more

more our averſion. The very thoughts of it, if we can but think at all, will take off the reliſh of our vicious enjoyments, and make all our headſtrong Paſſions give way, and our empty airy pleaſures will fly before it.

Now that Sin has conceiv'd in the World, 'tis our Happineſs that it has brought forth ſo deform'd a thing as Death; that though the Mother may diſguiſe her ſelf, and delude us with falſe Colours, and flattering words, yet the foulneſs of her Off-ſpring cannot be conceal'd, and in the Face of Death we may read the natural deformity of Sin.

Let us conſider this, and then let us entertain it if we dare, nay let us embrace it if we can; for how temptingly ſoever Sin may look upon us, yet Death is a powerful Antidote, 'tis enough to damp our Spirits, and chill our blood, and to change not only the inclinations, but the very conſtitution of our Fleſh.

Knowing theſe terrors of the Lord, ſurely we ſhall be *perſwaded*: conſidering the ſad conſequences of ſin, one would think there ſhould be little or no temptation in it; to a thinking Man, indeed, there is none at all, and 'tis a wonder that any Man can ſo far lay his thoughts aſide, as to hug a ſlavish gilded Chain, to fall in love with a

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fulſome

fullsome painted Sepulchre, and doze himself in poisonous Wine, only because he sees it sparkling in the glass.

All these are but imaginary Pleasures at the best; and yet these are all the Pleasures that a Sinner has; and what are all these, in comparison of that real, substantial eternal Joy, which we part with for these trifles sake: after such an exchange as this, we must never pretend to Judgment or Discretion more.

We that are so circumspect and wise in the little inferior concerns of Life, where is our wisdom in our great Affair, where is our circumspection, when our whole Happiness is at stake.

To get a poor livelihood upon earth, we can labour and toil, hunger and thirst, and sweat and starve, and applaud our selves for doing so: but here we can be content to stand all the day idle, and have our thoughts otherwise employ'd, and are so far from labouring for life, that we will not be at the trouble so much as to look before us. Nay, for the most part we make it our business to look the quite contrary way.

What indefatigable pains do we take to gratifie our foolish Lusts, when with half the pains we might learn to live much happier without them.

What

What violence do we use upon our selves, to lay our Souls and Consciences asleep, for fear the beautiful Prospect of Life should tempt us to be vertuous, or the dismal Apparitions of Death should affright us from our Vice, when half that force employ'd against our Vanities and Corruptions, would suffice to take Heaven it self by violence, and make us for ever happy.

But when Men have once sold themselves to work wickedness, how obstinately do they refuse to hear their own Reason speak! How do they disdain to be reclaim'd, though it be by the Word of God! That word which is *piercing as a two-edged sword*, they labour to put by with all their art, and defend themselves against it with the whole Artillery of the Devil; with the Helmet of Pride, the Shield of Obstinacy, and the Breastplate of Unbelief, Armour that is hardned in the bottomless Pit, they maintain a desperate Cause, and wage a senseless War against the Powers of Heaven.

So dangerous a thing is it to give way to Disobedience, that by degrees, it betrays us into Unbelief; and by slighting the notions of Good and Evil, we come at last to make no difference between Life and Death.

Thus the Devil, who is conscious of his own doom, and officious to prevent the like in us, teaches us *not to believe*, for fear we should tremble too: and *the terrors of the Lord*, are the very reason why some men will not be persuaded.

But let us bring more tractable dispositions to the word of God, and when he *sets before us life and good, and death and evil*, let us for our Information submit to his Judgment, and in our Choice let us comply with his desires. 'Tis no disparagement for the wisest Man to be instructed, and surely 'tis no condescension for the greatest Man to be sav'd. If we are desirous of *Life*, we know now upon what terms it must be had: if we will still follow after *Evil*, we know what will be the consequence: nay, the consequence will fall the heavier upon us for this very reason, because we know it; our condemnation will be the more just, our death the more unpitied, because it has been so often and so plainly set before us.

Seeing therefore we have so many Sins and sinful ignorances to be accounted for, let not our knowledge also be number'd amongst our transgressions; let not our means of grace, and opportunities of Glory come to inflame our Reckoning against the great Day of Account.

Many

Many a time have we been admonish'd of our Sins, and now once more are we forewarn'd of our danger. *See I have set before you this day also life and good, and death and evil.* God grant that we may even in this our day see the things that belong unto our Good, before they are hidden from our eyes.

FINIS.

BOOKS

BOOKS Printed for Walter Kettilby at the
Bishop's Head in St. Paul's Church-Yard.

DR. Burner's Theory of the Earth, the two last Books;
concerning the Conflagration of the World, and
the new Heavens, and the new Earth. *Fol.*

— Answer to Mr. Warren's Exceptions against the
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Filiation, Deity, and Satisfaction of our Saviour, assert-
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